

**HOW JANE CONQUEST
RANG THE BELL**

W. Hackney 1884



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Tw'as about the time of Christmas,
a many years ago,
when the sky was black with wrath and each
the earth was white with snow.

When loudly rang the tumult,
of winds and waves of strife.
In her home by the sea,
with her babe on her knee,
sat Harry Conquest's wife.
And he was on the ocean,
and she knew not,
knew not where.

For never a lip could tell of the ship
to lighten her heart's despair.
And the babe was dying, dying,
the pulse in its tiny wrist was all but still,
and the brow was chill, and pale as the white sea mist.

Jane Conquest's heart was hopeless,
she could only weep and pray
that the shepherd mild, would take the child
painlessly away.

The night grew deeper and deeper,
and the storm had a stronger will
and buried in deep and dreamless sleep
lay the hamlet under the hill.

And the fire was dead in the hearth stove
within Jane Conquest's room,
and still sat she with her babe on her knee
at prayer amid the gloom.

When born above the tempest,
a sound fell on her ear
thrilling her through, for well she knew
was the voice of mortal fear.

And a light leapt in at the lattice
sudden and swift and red,
crimsoning all the whited wall, and
the floor and the roof overhead.

It shone with a radiant glory on
the face of the dying child
like a foray, of the shadowless day
of the realms of the undefiled.

And it lit up the mother's features,
with a glow so strange and new
but whether t'was land or ocean or rock,
or sand or snow or sky o'r head on all was shed
the same force fatal glow.

And thro' the tempest bravely,
Jane Conquest fought her way
by snowy deep and slippery sleep
to where her present goal lay.

And she gained it pale and breathless
and weary and sore and faint
but with a soul possessed, with the strength
and gest and ardour of a saint.

Silent and weak and lovely,
armed with its countless graves
stood the old grey church on its tall rock perch
secure from the floods great waves.

And beneath its sacred shadow,
lay the hamlet safe and still.
For howsoever the sea and the wind might be
it was quiet under the hill.

Jane Conquest reached the church yard and
stood by the old church door
but the oak was tough and had bolts enough,
and her strength was frail and poor,
so she crept through a narrow window and
climbed the belfry stair
and grasped the rope sole cord of hope
for the mariners in despair.

And the wild wind helped her bravely
and she wrought with an earnest will
and the clamor spake out right well
to the hamlet under the hill
and it roused the slumbering fishers nor
its warning gale gave o'er
till a hundred fleet and eager feet
were hurrying to the shore.

And there it ceased its ringing for the
woman's work was done
and many a boat that was afloat
showed man's work was begun.

But the ringer in the belfry lay motionless and cold
with the cord of hope, the church bell rope
still in her frozen hold.
How long she lay it looks not, but
she woke from her swoon at last
in her own bright room, to find the gloom,
and the grief of the frail past.

With a sense of joy within her, and
the Christ sweet presence near
and friends around and the cooing sound
of her babe's voice in her ear.

And they told her all the story,
how a brave and gallant few
o'ercame each check and reached the wreck
and saved the hopeless crew
and how the curious rector
had climbed the belfry stair
and of his fright, when cold and white
he found her lying there.

And how when they had borne her
back to her home again
the child she left with a heart bereft
of hope and wrung with pain
was found within its cradle,
in a quiet slumber laid
with a peaceful smile on its lips the while,
and the wasting sickness slayed.

And she said twas Christ that watched it,
and brought it safely through
and she praised his faith and his lauder truth
who had saved her darling too.

And then there came a letter
across the surging foam
and last the breeze that over the seas,
bore Harry Conquest home.

And they told him all the story
that still their children tell
of the frightful light on that winter
night and the ringing of the bell.

(Found in the front cover of an old bible)